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SIPDIS

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(J. MUDGE) JUSTICE FOR OPDAT (C. LEHMAN)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [POLITICAL](#)

SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: KEEPING THE DRUGS IN THE FAMILY
BUSINESS

1. (SBU) Summary: Traders from South Kazakhstan ply age-old skills to traffic Afghan narcotics and local marijuana. MVD tries to clamp down but the mostly women drug dealers who manage the business get off lightly. Stiffer penalties for drug traffickers, as in Singapore, are on hold pending coalescence of public sentiment. End Summary.

BACKGROUND

2. (U) Historically, the families living in South Kazakhstan, bordering Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, have been well known for their trading skills. Notwithstanding the devastation wrought by a succession of invaders stretching back even before a Chinese incursion in 751 AD, the trade links were reestablished and even became famous. One of the trade routes passing through this area, which was part of the historic Silk Road, is still in use today.

3. (U) The tricks of the trade are passed from generation to generation. The southerners' finely honed merchant skills created a rule of thumb in Kazakhstan that the best traders usually come from the south, a cultural appellation that is similar to the label applied to the "canny" New England merchant in the 18th and 19th centuries. In South Kazakhstan, family businesses are a common occurrence and neighbors often join together to pool resources to maximize profits.

4. (U) The drugs flowing northward out of Afghanistan are just another product to buy and sell in this age-old trading area. The Afghan opiates coupled with the several million acres of naturally growing cannabis in the Chu River valley create lucrative opportunities for the savvy traders. (Note: the UN estimates that 35% of the total Afghanistan opiates, 1.7 tons, passes north to Europe. The Kazakhstani Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) estimates that approximately 16 tons of cannabis is harvested every year. End note.)

MVD CRACKS DOWN - BUT NOT ON WOMEN

5. (U) The usual route for drug trafficking is Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan-South Kazakhstan. As the UN reports, most of the illegal substances are in transit to Russia. In an interview with Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, the MVD Chairman of the Committee on Combating Narcotics said that usually around 20-30% amount remains in the transit country. This creates the opportunity for local residents to earn money reselling the narcotics. The "local people" are those family businesses which have historically had roots in the south. They often are large extended families and frequently the women serve as the distributors to the local addicts.

6. (U) Recently, the MVD announced it had opened a case against a "family business" in Shymkent, a city of over 600 thousand inhabitants in South Kazakhstan, where women from several families sold drugs to local consumers. This type of business model was discovered after an extensive investigation by MVD officers of the South Kazakhstan oblast who monitored several families for over a year and a half and finally accumulated enough evidence to arrest the illegal narcotics traders.

GIVING CUSTOMER SERVICE A BAD NAME

7. (U) According to a recent "Express-K" newspaper, Voroshilovka in South Kazakhstan oblast was the settlement with the most serious drug problem. The sales system worked smoothly in the outlying settlements like Voroshilovka, and neighborhoods of Shymkent. Until the crackdown, almost every street had its own heroin dealer. The drug sellers provided their clients with all necessary paraphernalia, including the all important syringe, even going so far as to provide the opportunity to inject in special rooms.

ALL IN THE FAMILY (DRUG) BUSINESS

18. (SBU) In an interesting turn from the traditional male-dominated culture in Kazakhstan, very few men are involved in drug trafficking; almost all of those arrested for drug dealing are married women. (Note: This is not because men are more law-abiding, but likely because men know that they will get a stiffer sentence than a woman - especially a married woman -- for the same crime. End note.)

19. (U) One of the most notorious family businesses was the Suleimanov clan. 44-year old Nigara Suleimanova organized the family business at the end of the 1980's. For the last twenty years she ran the whole drug network, involving her cousins, nieces, and daughters-in-law, and sharing profits with them. Suleimanova had about ten trade outlets; each received 150-200 clients a day, charging 200 tenge (\$1.50) for one dose of marijuana.

110. (U) The family businesses enlist the neighborhood to protect them. Each step of a policeman appearing in the settlement is monitored and noted. Some dealers employ drug addicts to stand watch, paying them one dose a day to keep watch over the territory day and night and inform their "employers" if a policeman approaches. It is very difficult for the policemen to detain the criminals at the moment of sale, since almost all of the settlement inhabitants support the drug sellers. Even children have their role to throw stones at policemen to distract them. Newspapers report cases in which parents required their children to deliver doses to drug addicts.

MVD SAYS YOU CAN RUN BUT YOU CAN'T HIDE

11. (U) Drug traffickers, knowing that they can evade punishment, spread their sales network all over Kazakhstan. However, 40 such sales outlets and 34 "hideways" (places where drug addicts take their daily doses of pills, intravenous injection, or marijuana cigarettes) were eliminated by law enforcement officers in South Kazakhstan last year. The owners of 15 of the "hideways" were women.

SINGAPORE WANNABE? NOT SO FAST.

112. (U) According to press reports, police frequently lament that drugs and drug use are spreading rapidly. In some articles policemen complain about the insufficiency of the existing legislation, according to which a drug sale nets a person only five to eight years in jail, after which he is released and often returns to the same business. The police also find it unfair that women, using the fact that they are pregnant or responsible for raising several children, have their sentences commuted for the criminal activity.

113. (SBU) Beginning in 2005, the Committee on Combating Narcotics proposed toughening the legislation for drug traffickers. The Cabinet of Ministers considered the draft law but decided to postpone sending it to the Mazhilis (lower house of parliament) without knowing the true state of public opinion on this matter. The amendments contained such severe punishment, up to life imprisonment or the death penalty for drug trafficking and involving juveniles in drug sales, that they were deemed too severe to be acceptable to Kazakhstani society.

114. (SBU) Comment: The MVD Committee on Combating Narcotics sees two ways to eliminate drug dealing - toughen the legislation to increase the penalties and, not discussed above, implement demand reduction programs for children. Given the economic incentives, it appears that demand reduction will not deter children from following in their parents' footsteps, and there is a lack of societal consensus about the desirability of increasing the severity of sentences. At the same time, battling police corruption, which is a necessary condition for the survival of the "family business", seems to garner only occasional enthusiasm at MVD HQ. In short, drugs are detected, people are detained, but in many cases, a quick bribe is all that is necessary to free the drug dealer, enrich the officer, and undercut all other counter-narcotics efforts.

ORDWAY